



## ***Committee on City Services and the Northampton City Council***

### Committee Members:

*Chair: Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge*

*Vice-Chair: Councilor Karen Foster*

*Councilor Rachel Maiore*

*Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr.*

### Meeting Minutes

Date: May 10, 2021

Virtual Meeting

#### **1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

At 4 p.m., Councilor Marianne L. LaBarge (Chair) called the meeting to order. On a roll call, Councilor LaBarge, Councilor Karen Foster (Vice Chair), Councilor Rachel Maiore and Councilor Michael J. Quinlan, Jr. were present. Also present were Northampton Mayor David Narkewicz, Charlene Nardi and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler

#### **2. ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING**

Councilor LaBarge announced that the meeting was being audio/video recorded.

#### **3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There being no members of the public present, there was no public comment.

#### **4. MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 1, 2021**

Councilor LaBarge announced that the minutes were not ready for acceptance.

#### **5. ITEMS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE**

##### **A. 21.232 Appointment of Charlene Nardi as Finance Director - referred by City Council 4/1/2021**

Mayor Narkewicz said he is very pleased to introduce them to Charlene Nardi, his appointment to become the city's next finance director. Ms. Nardi has served as the town administrator for the town of Williamsburg since 2011 and prior to that was town administrator for the town of Chesterfield. She was also Williamsburg's town clerk for 10 years and served on the Williamsburg School Committee. She has a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and brings a wealth of administrative, budgetary and leadership skills to the city's financial management team.

As has been his practice for all departmental appointments, he worked with a small but highly-skilled screening committee in this selection. Led by Personnel Director Glenda Stoddard, the team included Chief of Staff Alan Wolf, DPW Director Donna LaScaleia, Amherst Finance Director Sean Mangano and Finance Committee chair and Council President Gina-Louise Sciarra. Ms. Nardi was both his top choice and the top choice of the screening committee. As councilors know, Northampton has ongoing relationships and collaboration with the town of

Williamsburg on many projects so he has had the opportunity to work with her on many occasions in his time as mayor. She is a professional with a wealth of municipal experience and is well-respected among her peers in western Mass., and he believes she will be highly-successful as the city's next finance director.

Ms. Nardi said she is honored to be chosen for this position and looks forward to being part of a team for Northampton. She said she is happy to answer any questions.

Councilor LaBarge opened the floor to questions from councilors.

Councilor Quinlan asked Ms. Nardi to describe the difference between the positions of town administrator (TA) and finance director, voicing his perception that the TA position is broader in scope. He asked her how she feels about narrowing her focus in a larger community.

Ms. Nardi agreed the TA position has a broader scope as TA's handle a lot more of everything in depth. The position in Northampton will be more focused on financial aspects so her focus won't be divided. There will definitely be things she has to learn and she talked with the mayor about there being many opportunities for training. The basic financial processes in towns and cities are the same - setting the budget, maintaining the community's bond rating, issuing bonds, etc. – the city of Northampton just deals with bigger numbers.

Councilor Quinlan asked if she viewed any parts of the position as particular challenges.

Ms. Nardi said absolutely. Finance Director Susan Wright is involved in several professional organizations and she hopes to be a part of them as well. Collector/Treasurer training is offered every August. She knows Susan Wright attended when she first started and she is very interested in attending. She is very pleased because she knows a lot of Northampton's department heads are well-respected and very knowledgeable and she looks forward to being brought up to speed by them on the operations of their departments.

Councilor Foster asked what drew her from Williamsburg to the Northampton finance director job. What was the appeal for you?

As Councilor Quinlan pointed out, this is more focused, Ms. Nardi responded. Over the last 14 years she has learned a lot about what cities and towns have to do in Massachusetts and has become more interested in the financial aspects. The foundation of local communities is their financial standing. When the position became available she saw it as an opportunity to grow and learn. She has great respect for the people who live and work for the city.

As Northampton looks at COVID recovery, Councilor Foster asked what challenges and opportunities she sees within the finance director role in assisting in COVID recovery.

She knows there is a lot of money coming from the federal government. With American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, there are four broad categories of eligible activities: 1) helping businesses, 2) using it for premium pay (she is not sure this is recommended at this point), 3) using it to reimburse or fill in where revenues are low (she knows Northampton has been challenged with meals tax, marijuana and parking revenue), and 4) infrastructure for water and

sewer (Northampton has made some adjustments in its budget to offset losses in this area and she thinks the city has also been talking about broadband). She thinks there is a lot of opportunity for the finance director to support the mayor. The idea is to use the funding to help the city recover.

As a finance director, she will definitely be spending time talking councilors through questions they have and there is a public education component to the budget, Councilor Foster noted. She asked how she approaches that in Williamsburg and whether she finds herself taking on that task there.

Town administrators have the pleasure of working with department heads and talking on Town Meeting floor, which is a big public meeting with a lot of voters who are not necessarily familiar with how government works. Although she doesn't always speak, it is usually her words people are speaking because she puts together explanations for the people who do speak. In both cases, she's had a lot of experience doing that. She is not a person who needs to use big words or be the smartest person in the room, her goal is to make sure everybody understands the process. She would like to believe she is good at that.

Councilor Maiore said Councilor Foster asked her questions. She welcomed her to Northampton.

Councilor LaBarge asked how the practices she utilizes in a small town will transfer to a large community. She asked the population of Williamsburg.

Ms. Nardi said it is 2,500.

Though she will be new to this position, what might she anticipate as immediate challenges? Councilor LaBarge asked.

Northampton has so many things going on and so much happening, Ms. Nardi observed. For her, it will be learning all the players in Northampton; not only the topics and challenges but also who the players are and who she needs to work with. Getting to know the direct people she will be working with - auditors, collector/treasurers, etc. Those are her first goals, to get to know people and learn where the focus should be with the finances. She looks forward to Ms. Wright outlining some things for her and is thankful to have the next month to do that.

She is not so much worried about the processes themselves but the people and the players. She needs to understand the people she's working with to do the best job and to provide the best information for those people.

Councilor LaBarge asked what her best methods are for communicating and keeping everyone in the loop, including the city council.

She does think communication is really important, Ms. Nardi said. She feels it is very important to see people face to face to get to know them. That's a little harder now with COVID. Keeping not only her door open but physically getting up and going to other people's doors. She has talked to a lot of people so she knows Susan Wright maintains a lot of visibility. Her goal and priority is to maintain that communication.

Councilor LaBarge thanked her for what she's heard. She has worked with Susan Wright for many, many years and not one time has she called her and not been helped to work through a financial question.

Mayor Narkewicz closed by saying one of the things that made Susan Wright so effective is that she started out as a small town administrator; that's how she spent the early part of her career. As a town administrator, you literally learn every aspect of city government; it's not just numbers on a spreadsheet, but putting the numbers together with the operations. He knows Susan thinks Charlene will be a great successor.

Councilor LaBarge moved to approve the appointment of Charlene Nardi as the new finance director with a positive recommendation to the full city council. Councilor Foster seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

## **6. New Business**

### **A. Discuss/Compile Questions for Animal Control Officer**

Animal Control Officer Shayla Howe will be the guest at the committee's next meeting June 7<sup>th</sup>. The administrative assistant asked councilors to please send her any specific questions they for Shayla by Friday, May 21<sup>st</sup>.

### **B. Process/Scheduling for End-of-Year Reappointments**

Members discussed that, although there is value in speaking to candidates for reappointment, due to the volume of reappointments at the end of the fiscal year (an estimated 25 are known so far), it wouldn't be the thoughtful process they are used to. Members decided to forgo interview-reappointments in this next round and instead decided to just interview initial appointments.

Members opted to maintain the custom of taking the month of August off.

With regard to upcoming departmental presentations, Councilor Foster suggested a discussion about the potential for aerial spraying. She has personally reached out to Health Director Merridith O'Leary and would like to put that on their radar as a discussion they'd like to have. She suggested perhaps inviting her in in the fall. Councilor LaBarge said that sounds fine. She's hearing about it from people herself.

## **7. Adjourn**

There being no further business, Councilor Foster moved to adjourn. Councilor Quinlan seconded. The motion carried 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 4:38 p.m.

*Prepared By:*

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